

## Review of periodical articles (2016) - Middle Ages (Jelle Haemers)

Today, migration, refugees, and violence against aliens are regular news items. Political crises, war, and social conflict elsewhere make that many people try to pursue happiness, security, and economic opportunities in the Western world. Often these people are welcome, but sometimes animosities between local people and the aliens occur. In popular media the explanation for these confrontations and the unwillingness of locals to accept migrants within their community is found in the otherness of the newcomers, difficulties of integration, and even their economic activities ('They take our jobs!'). Historical research however by Bart Lambert and Milan Pajic shows that an alternative explanation can be given for similar conflicts between locals and foreigners in the past. They argue that governmental policies should also be taken into account when explaining aggression against aliens. In 1381 about 40 Flemings were killed in London and Southwark during a violent episode of the revolt which held England in its grip. Most of these Flemings were immigrants or descendants of exiles and refugees from Flanders. In the mid-fourteenth century, political conflict between artisans and the Flemish count had obliged many cloth workers to cross the Canal. As both authors demonstrate, most of them continued their craft in towns like Colchester, Norwich, and London. The violence perpetrated by the English against these people in 1381 was until now explained as being the result of different identities clashing, and the economic problems of the later fourteenth century: the murderers were native cloth workers dissatisfied with the competition of the newcomers from abroad. Lambert and Pajic however convincingly argue that the bloodshed was triggered by the government's policies. In the course of the fourteenth century, the crown developed a new policy aimed at attracting skilled workers from abroad (such as Flemings - most of them were well-off master artisans). Convinced that their activities benefited the common profit of the realm, Edward III had granted the Flemish immigrants favorable privileges, though the king remained deaf to the concern's of the London's native weavers, who had petitioned repeatedly for similar privileges as the immigrants. An inquiry into these petitions demonstrates that the weavers were not complaining against the presence of the aliens as such, but against the crown who ignored their wishes to improve their economic situation. In 1381, the Flemish weavers produced different kinds of cloth than the English weavers, so they provided no direct competition. Instead, in 1381 the native weavers were expressing their desperation at the lack of support from the English royal government in the face of challenging trends in the cloth making business. The revolt of 1381 provided thus an outlet for social groups in English society who, for decades, had been frustrated with the inadequacies of government policies. All came to the surface in 1381, with (among others) the London bloodshed as a result. During the vacuum of power in that year the London native cloth workers had concluded that their economic problems would never be solved politically. Therefore they took up their weapons with the aim of attacking a group which had been granted economic privileges by the crown. As a result the Flemings became the victim of the crown's inadequacy to meet with the economic difficulties of English artisans ('Immigration and the common profit: native cloth workers, Flemish exiles, and royal policy in fourteenth-century London', *Journal of British Studies*, 55 (2016), 633-657).

The relationship between foreigners and citizens in the local economy is also discussed by Francisco Appellániz, albeit in the Islamic world ('Judging the Franks: proof, justice, and diversity in late medieval Alexandria and Damascus', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 58 (2016), 350-378).

According to legal historians, Western legal systems to judge economic (and other) conflicts were far from formalist and broke with local oral and irrational systems of proof in the Near East. All too often it has been considered that local legal systems in cities at the eastern side of the Mediterranean were kept fundamentally separated from judicial practices introduced by the Franks until the age of colonization, where Islamic law maintained the biases against non-Muslims and its main formalist traits. Yet, Appellániz challenges the view of two opposed normative systems. His study on legal practices in Alexandria and Damascus demonstrates that legal relations and collaboration went far beyond the range of tolerance and coexistence, because a common notarial culture emerged facilitating transactions between local merchants and strangers. This culture was an amalgam of practices used by notaries sent to the Mamluk cities by the Venetian government on the one side, and royal justice created by the Sultans on the other side. Together with the expansion of the jurisdiction of the so-called 'siyasa' (new royal courts where justice was dispensed by government officials instead of by traditional judges) over the affairs of foreigners, a much deeper legal interplay was brought about than has previously been understood. Ultimately, this article argues, Mediterranean medieval societies had evolving attitudes toward justice and diversity. They approached their own legal traditions in ways compatible with the conflict resolution, while constantly borrowing legal concepts about difference from each other. As a result, transaction costs of trade were lowered, and economic opportunities for local citizens and foreign merchants improved due to this new notarial culture combining aspects of Eastern and Western legal systems.

Not only a favorable legal system but also an attractive accommodation was necessary to facilitate commerce and international trade in the medieval town, as is shown by an extensive study of the so-called 'Poortersloge' of Bruges (F. Buylaert, J. De Rock, J. Dumolyn, 'La loge des bourgeois de Bruges. Les stratégies de distinction d'une élite commerçante cosmopolite', *Revue du Nord*, 414 (2016), 37-69). In Bruges, one of the main commercial centers of the later medieval North Sea area, the 'Poortersloge' (Burghers' Lodge) was a remarkable building, constructed in various phases from about 1400. This Gothic construction in natural stone still exists today, although in a strongly restored form. Its main function was to serve as a space for the social and cultural life of the urban commercial elite, a place in which local merchants, but also foreign traders and citizens met. It was not a unique building in Europe, because the authors compare it with the *lonjas* of the Iberian Peninsula, the Italian *loggie*, the houses of merchant guilds in the Hanseatic towns, or the English guildhalls. Combining iconographical material, archeological evidence, and archival sources, they demonstrate that such buildings created a perfect environment for the commercial elite to invest in informal networks, discuss trade deals, and talk about political and cultural ideas. The 'Poortersloge', as its counterparts elsewhere in Europe, served as the preferred *locus* of economic and cultural exchange in a city that functioned as a crossroad between merchants coming from the North and the South, from the industrious Flemish hinterland and the British isles. In sum, it was a cosmopolite arena facilitating commerce of economic and social elites.

Another empirical study of urban economic space is Justin Colson's 'Commerce, clusters, and community: a re-evaluation of the occupational geography of London, c. 1400-c. 1550', *The Economic History Review*, 69 (2016), 104-130. Colson argues that classic assumptions regarding the breakdown of medieval spatial organisation are misplaced, and instead presents a narrative of London's merchants and tradesmen responding to the continually evolving influence of locational economics. Often the medieval city is seen as having been strictly regulated, both in terms of markets, and in terms of space, while the early-modern city is associated with the breakdown of rigid regulation by

guilds and a new commercial outlook. This article, based on prosopographical data found in 14,700 Londoners' wills dating from between 1370 and 1570, reveals that at the beginning of the fifteenth century many of the London's occupations were indeed relatively clustered. However, while some economic activities (such as those of the mercers) became less spatially concentrated in the following centuries, Colson shows that throughout the fifteenth and the majority of the sixteenth century, companies which had a strongly defined specialism (such as the fishmongers and the bowyers) largely continued their traditional forms of clustering. Rather than the end of the Middle Ages having marked a dramatic change from guild-based spatial organisation, occupational clusters simply continued to evolve because the craftsmen experienced that the same agglomeration benefits in their trades. In the early years of craft guilds, the lack of formally sanctioned regulation encouraged strong informal links, fostered by co-location, to ensure the communal goals of quality regulation, training, and political representation. In later times especially small guilds remained clustered despite moving across the city. While the place of 'best benefits' to them may have changed, it was still in their advantage to associate together. Bigger companies, however, spread across the city because the increasing specialisation, as well as a general evolution in patterns and practices of trade, lead to a disconnection between company identity and occupation. This divergence meant that the commonalities of experience and interest that bound companies together to begin with started to erode. As a result, London's economic space evolved into a patchwork of clusters of specialized craftsmen on the one hand, and other types of trade which could be found on different spots in the city on the other.

Some merchants, however, lived on the margins. Formal markets, licensed and overseen by public authorities were not the only commercial outlets in the medieval city. Throughout the medieval period, informal circuits, where trade was conducted without official authorization, regulation and taxation, abounded across Europe. A study of Bart Lambert on the informal market in fifteenth-century Bruges and Sluys (the port town on the waterway between Bruges and the Nord Sea) demonstrates that the regulatory environment of the formal economy created barriers and costs that drove people into informality. The accounts of the so-called 'water-bailiff' of Bruges (preserved from 1400 until 1411 and from 1450 until 1479) contain 245 cases in which people had acted against staple regulations. The city's privileges made the staple obligatory and exclusive for several trades. Many people however, were prosecuted for economic, fiscal and monetary violations of the staple rights. Remarkably, 28% of them were women. Their high involvement in low-level work, the most distinguishing characteristic of which was the absence of rules and guild control, emphasises the particularly straitened economic circumstances endured by women due to staple restrictions, something also attested in literary sources. Classic studies on the economic success of late medieval Bruges ignore such groups because they have not taken the informal market into their analysis. Therefore they fail to do justice to the whole story of commercial hustle and bustle in and around the city. Bruges' role as a depot for goods from all across Europe, securely buttressed by the staple system, gave thousands of merchants access to lucrative trading possibilities, but at the same time locked the door to many others. They had to look for other ways to benefit from the city's success. As a result, they operated in an 'informal' market ignoring the rigid regulation of trade - presumably similar groups were at work in other port towns in late medieval Europe ('Merchants on the margins: fifteenth-century Bruges and the informal market', *Journal of Medieval History*, 42 (2016), 226-253).

Urban space was not only transformed because of economic change, as we have seen, but also for political purposes. Indeed, an important evolution in the political history of cities, namely the

increasing rights of political participation of citizens, has changed the outlook of urban space dramatically. Studying a linguistic development, namely the use of the word 'platea' in texts describing the urban space of communal Italy, Hendrik Dey shows that a significant evolution took place in the morphology of towns like Siena, Florence, and Lucca ('From "street" to "piazza": urban politics, public ceremony, and the redefinition of platea in communal Italy and beyond', *Speculum*, 91 (2016), 919-944). In the earlier Middle Ages, 'platea' referred to broad streets and monumental routes serving (among others) as the backdrop for ceremonial processions by ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries. Such ceremonies proclaimed the majesty of their rank and the prestige of the institutions which they represented. In later centuries, however, piazzas and big squares, also called 'plateae', increasingly prevailed as focal points for political and ceremonial intercourse. The change from the 'platea-street' to 'platea-piazza', in other words, appears to be a semantic index of a watershed moment in the urban trajectories of Italian cities. The late-antique 'platea' was no longer the most representative and symbolically charged urban public space in the twelfth and thirteenth century because it was eclipsed by a new focus on circumscribed islands of open space on which the commune gathered in order to govern autonomously the city (as happened likewise in cities located to the north the Alps). In the Italian communes a self-conscious civic icon was born, the piazza, a topographical centerpiece destined to be the epicenter of commercial, political and ceremonial intercourse, just as the monumental avenues built at cities like Milan, Ravenna, and Verona in the fourth to the sixteenth centuries had been in their time. From 1100 on however, the central market squares, mostly closely located to other symbols of communal power such as city halls and bell towers, predominated. When they began to do so, topographically and institutionally speaking, Dey shows, they usurped the name together with a large share of the political, symbolic, and even economic associations of the urban thoroughfares formerly also known as 'plateae'.

Two articles show that such central squares were the preferred location for urban governors to display their power in late medieval Europe, but at the same time they also functioned as places of contest when their power was challenged by citizens. The discussion of Mario Damen on the material and spatial features of tournaments taking place on the central market square of Brussels ('Grote Markt'), investigates how the tournament acquired meaning in the urban space where it was organized ('The town as a stage? Urban space and tournaments in late medieval Brussels', *Urban History*, 43 (2016), 47-71). Using archival, iconographical, and narrative sources, Damen shows us the dynamics of an inherently courtly festival within an urban setting. In close collaboration with the Brussels' political elite, the duke of Brabant and his household used the public space of the 'Grote Markt' and the facilities of the adjacent town hall to display their wealth and status during tournaments. The market square was of course a practical arena with outstanding facilities, both for tourneyers and spectators, but it also served as a place in which the courtly and urban elite displayed their power. It is of course not a coincidence that citizens who wanted to contest the government of the elite tried to occupy these squares during moments of revolt. For instance, Valentina Costantini demonstrates that the butchers in fourteenth-century Siena occupied the market place when they rebelled against the Nine, as the government of the city was called. For practical reasons, but also using its symbolic meaning, the butchers used the square to utter their discontent - as they did elsewhere. Indeed, Costantini systematically compares urban uprisings and conspiracies of butcher's guilds in late medieval Europe with the aim to show that a pattern of rebellion can be distinguished. Social and political tensions within the butcher's guild in many cities forced a two-way split within the guild and its elites. The 1318 rebellion in Siena, for instance, shows that the guild's elite sided with

the urban governors, while at the same time the rank and file of the guild rebelled against the latter's policies. Occupying central spaces in this revolt was an important feature to let it succeed, though the internal divisions within the butcher's guild of Siena made it ultimately fail ('On a red line across Europe: butchers and rebellions in fourteenth-century Siena', *Social History*, 41 (2016), 72-92).

Artisans' revolts and counter-attacks of urban elites are the topics discussed in two other articles, namely Jelle Haemers' 'Révolte et requête. Les gens de métiers et les conflits sociaux dans les villes de Flandre (XIIIe-XVe siècle)', *Revue Historique*, 677 (2016), 27-55, and 'Die verlorene Ehre der Patrizier. Reformen in oberrheinischen Städten im 15. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung. Beihefte*, 53 (2016), 159-177, of Olivier Richard. In the cities under scrutiny in both articles, craft guild associations were at the center of the major disturbances. In cities like Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres (in the article of Haemers), or Basel, Strasbourg, and Bern (Richard's piece) the crafts engaged in similar forms of collective action, such as petitioning, collective assembly and the occupation of public space. Bargaining with the urban elites was in both regions, Flanders, and the Upper Rhine, a continuous process which could take different forms. In Flanders, as Haemers demonstrates, written collective petitions seem to have been the main means of the craftsmen to influence urban politics. Less than being the first option for guild leaders to use in times of conflict, violence however was committed by ordinary craftsmen in the first place. Guild governors regularly tried to restrain the violence used by commoners with the aim to improve the chances of their petitions being approved. An in-depth study of these bills dating from the late 13<sup>th</sup> until the late 15<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates that several of the social, economic, and political claims of the craftsmen have led to fundamental transformations of the urban government in the Low Countries. Also in the towns of the Upper Rhine collective actions of craftsmen had caused a series of political reforms which had deprived patricians of a large part of their political power. Studying among others a petition composed by the urban nobility of Strasbourg, Richard demonstrates not only that it used written means to influence decision making processes (as was also done by the Flemish artisans), but that violence was also for them an option to regain power. Furthermore, their last attempt to recover power during the so-called 'Dachstein war' in 1418 can be compared to similar events in Basel (the 'Basle secession' of 1414) and the 'Twingerherrenstreit' in Bern in 1469-71. In all three cities the patricians or urban noblemen mainly insisted upon the loss of honour they were suffering when complaining about their loss of power. Collectively leaving the city (as artisans in Flanders also did) was used as a means to put pressure on their political opponents, but in the end they remained unsuccessful in their attempt to regain control over the cities. Richard concludes that only one option was left to the patricians if they wanted to regain their honor: accepting to integrate into the new institutional order of these cities.

In order to maintain their power urban elites could use religious rituals. In modern historiography ceremonies such as processions which served a political goal are often conceptualized as forms of 'civic religion'. A part of the purpose of an article written by Andrew Brown is to reassess the value of this term that has proved remarkably persistent: after half a century of use, and despite criticism, historians continue to deploy it ('Civic religion in late medieval Europe', *Journal of Medieval History*, 42 (2016), 338-356). Brown shows however that the meaning of this term differs widely, and he distinguishes three main clusters of research, loosely called the North American, the Francophone, and the German approach. While North American scholars have emphasized the importance of charity, confraternities, and the friars in creating a particular kind of collective religious life (for instance in Italian city-states), German historiography focuses on the role played by 'memory' and in

particular by commemorative foundations when studying 'civic religion'. French scholarship, in turn, sees '*religion civique*' as the collection of religious phenomena in which civil power plays a determining role, principally through the action of municipal authorities. Brown points at several problems arising for historians when they use such an anachronistic term, but concludes that it is still a useful term to describe the nature of municipal attempts to develop the sacred potential of the authority of urban governors. A second part of the article illustrates therefore the 'usefulness' of the concept 'civic religion' for historical research. With a comparative study of examples of late medieval Zaragoza, Bruges, and Salisbury, Brown demonstrates that the term might serve as a productive one for an analysis of key religious practices within the medieval urban environment. In claiming the authority to orchestrate processions, supervise charity and order street life, the governors of these three cities, Brown argues, could claim to rule for a sacred common good. When organising religious ceremonies, the men who ran city governments sought to demonstrate that the goals of the governing few and those of the urban many were one and the same at a moral and sacred level. These changes did not happen at the same pace in all late medieval cities: as above all American scholars have outlined, Italian city-states were more precocious than most, and did not need to incorporate the interests of overlords into their promotion of the civic good. But the difficulties their ruling bodies faced, and the investments they made in administrative structures and in semi-religious ceremony were similar in kind to towns elsewhere.

In an article on the charity organised by the main hospital of late medieval Chartres, Armand Colin elaborates on one of these expressions of civic religion ('Le salut par les œuvres : les bienfaiteurs laïcs de l'Aumône Notre-Dame de Chartres à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Histoire, Économie & Société*, 35 (2016), 12-38). During the Middle Ages, donations to hospitals were extremely commendable since they were thought to be redemptive. Consequently, to be redeemed, Chartres' elite made lots of donations to the Notre Dame hospital. A detailed study of 536 charters containing information on these donations, dating from the foundation of the institution in the second half of the eleventh until the beginning of the sixteenth century, shows that not only urban elites found their way to the hospital. Only 24% of the donators could be linked to the wealthy families in the town, though one third of the total population under investigation remained unidentified. Clerics and artisans also provided the hospital with money, annuities, and goods. Last but not least, also the French king patronized it, by granting favorable rights. With their generosity the donors tried to reach one and the same goal: the salvation of their soul. The help given to the hospital community together with the establishment of masses in the name of the donor were the main medium through which this redemption was made possible. Of course, Chartres was not the only city in which such a pattern of alms-giving was notified by historians, but unfortunately the author has not taken the effort to compare his findings with similar phenomena happening in other towns outside France in the same period. A comparative approach of urban history across Europe is however worth the effort!